

[Subscribe →](#)

[News](#) [Opinion](#) [Sport](#) [Culture](#) [Lifestyle](#)

Paint a true picture of art in China

Thu 2 Jan 2003 01.30 GMT

<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2003/jan/02/guardianletters>

Bad enough for Channel 4 to be falling to the depths of exotic sensationalism, but I was surprised that the Guardian would also see newsworthiness in printing such a "story" (C4 to show artist eating dead baby, December 30). The reality is Beijing is a wonderful city, but still a tightly regulated one. There are practically no major galleries of modern art, public or private, except the excellent one dedicated to Xu Beihong. Artists complain of the usual things: endless bureaucracy (eg trying to open a gallery), implicit or explicit censorship and, of course, the lack of funding. The inevitable divide between classicists and modernists exists, though "modern" takes on a whole new meaning given China's long history.

A few artists have started to exploit the emerging western appetite for raunchy Chinese art - the "dead baby" artist (as he will inevitably be known, even after we finally learn it's all fake) and the book Shanghai Baby are cases in point. These artists neither reflect the tastes of mainstream Chinese society, nor represent qualitatively the best examples of contemporary practice. They are, however, crucial to the overall development of a society which has historically lacked the concept and articulation of critical inquiry.

With so many other internationally renowned Chinese artists, film-makers, writers etc to showcase - not to mention our own British artists of Chinese descent - could not C4 and the Guardian have found a more interesting story than one that reinforces the same old prejudices?

Peter Vlachos

Trustee, British Chinese Artists' Association